
MODERN RUSSIA: IDEOLOGY, POLITICS, CULTURE AND RELIGION

IGOR DOBAEV. GEOPOLITICAL STUDIES IN THE SOUTH
OF RUSSIA

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Abstract. The article describes the process of the emergence and development of geopolitics as a science and a method of multifactor analysis: from traditional to civilizational, from global to regional and

even local. The author considers the main postulates of the founding fathers of the Anglo-Saxon, German, Russian and French geopolitical schools. Special attention is paid to the origin and development of Russian geopolitics, its current state. Among a number of directions, the Eurasian and the neo-Eurasian ones, their general and special features are distinguished. The milestones of the development of geopolitical thought in the South of Russia are spelled out, while it is noted that the geopolitical method, which has absorbed the achievements of "weak" French geopolitics, is effective, productive and is a good help in the political, sociological and strategic analysis of not only global problems of our time, but also important issues of national, regional and even local levels.

Geopolitics as a science grew out of political geography at the end of the 19th century, but attempts to comprehend the connection between the political organization of society in the person of the state and the surrounding space took place in the works of philosophers, historians and politicians already in ancient times.

The scientific and theoretical development of classical (traditional) geopolitics originates from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The term "geopolitics" was introduced into scientific circulation in 1916 by the Swedish geographer R. Chellen, who defined it as the science of the state, personifying a "geographical organism in space". The provisions of geopolitics were developed in the works of the founding fathers of its classical schools – the German political geographer Friedrich Ratzel, the American Admiral Alfred Mahan, the Englishman Halford Mackinder, the French geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache, later the German General Karl Haushofer and the German lawyer Karl Schmitt. They were the creators of the national schools of geopolitics – American, English, German, French. They understood geopolitics as a system of knowledge about the control of space.

The development of the geopolitical discipline from its founders to the present time has followed several parallel trajectories. In accordance with the fundamental concepts of geopolitics, the most important schools of this science were divided into three branches – maritime, land and coastal. The maritime and the land are considered strong geopolitical schools operating in global categories. It was their founders who derived the main law of classical geopolitics – geopolitical dualism, which consists in the eternal global confrontation of the states of sea and land civilizations (Sea and Continent, thalassocracy and tellurocracy). As for French (coastal) geopolitics, it is considered weak. On its basis, regional and local geopolitical directions appeared in the second half of the twentieth century.

Maritime geopolitics has become widespread in the British and American elites, and since the 1970s has become one of the most popular methodologies for political and military-strategic analysis of world politics and international relations in the United States.

The land (continental) school was formed in the 1920s in Germany and in the most general approximation (in hints and essays, rather than in a systematic presentation) among Russian Eurasians.

The “coastal line” in this discipline was being developed in France, at the Vidal de la Blache school, which was revived in the 1970s, together with the geopolitical magazine “Herodotus” by the modern geopolitician Yves Lacoste.

The foundations of the Russian school of geopolitics were laid by the famous Slavophiles – the Kireevsky brothers and the Aksakov brothers, A.S. Khomyakov and, in particular, the “last Slavophile” and the “forerunner of Eurasianism” – K.N. Leontiev. However, it was put as a science on a solid ideological basis and methodological basis by two great men of the 19th century, who worked in close scientific and scientific-political cooperation – the most prominent statesman of the Empire, Count D.A. Milyutin

and the famous scientist N.Y. Danilevsky. Through their efforts, geopolitics became a practical guide for the state activities of the Russian Empire.

Subsequently, in Russia, geopolitical views were formed in such directions as civilizational, socio-political and natural-scientific. This was due, firstly, to the establishment of the Eurasian status of Russia, its stable position within the borders of the Eurasian Empire, secondly, to economic growth, expansion of international relations, and thirdly, to the development of natural science, which began during the reforms of Peter the Great. Among the researchers of this time, one can name such scientists as K.M. Behr, V.I. Lamansky, L.I. Mechnikov, D.I. Mendeleev, etc.

Further evolutionary shifts in Russia's geopolitical views are observed in the works of E.A. Vandam (Edrikhin), A. Rado, V.P. Semenov-Tyan-Shansky, A.E. Snegarev and others.

However, after 1917, the attitude of the Soviet government to geopolitics became cool, and gradually geopolitics and geopolitics were ousted from the sphere of politics proper, sketches of geopolitical approaches are found only in the emigrant current of Eurasianism and in the teaching of military geography and operational country studies in closed military institutions. During this period, abroad, in the emigrant environment, Russian geopolitics received a new development, became the basis and fruit of the work of such an interesting scientific phenomenon as Eurasianism. The classics of middle-generation geopolitics were the pillars of Eurasianism – N.S. Trubetskoy, P.N. Savitsky, G.V. Vernadsky and others, and in Russia – “the last Eurasian” L.N. Gumilev. The Eurasians viewed Russia as a special civilization, different from the Western and Eastern ones.

In addition to the traditional (classical) version, there is also a *new* (economic) geopolitics (geo-economics) and the *newest* (civilizational) geopolitics. In other words, despite the youth of geopolitics as a science, there has been a transformation of geopolitical thinking: from traditional geopolitics (military

power) to new geopolitics, or geo-economics (economic power), and, finally, to the latest, or civilizational geopolitics. This trend has affected the fundamental foundations of the world order, the symbols of which are “big spaces”, capital (gold) and information, including tradition as communication in time. The main category of geopolitics are *spaces*: physical (land, water, air, underwater sphere, space, etc.) and metaphysical (political, economic, environmental, demographic, military, etc.). At the same time, without denying the importance of a multitude of physical and metaphysical spaces, modern traditionalist geopolitics claim that they represent only a kind of background on which the struggle of strategic opponents - the states of land and sea civilizations - unfolds, and the main law of geopolitics (the law of fundamental dualism) determines the essence of the global and regional processes taking place.

Geopolitics experienced a new rise on a global scale in the 1990s, when there was a need to explain the main events of world politics in new coordinate systems. And it turned out that geopolitics fully meets these requirements. In addition, the rejection of ideological rhetoric revealed the fact that most American strategic planning centers continue to develop the tradition of British and American geopolitics of the Atlanticist school (Mackinder, Speakman, later Zb. Brzezinski, G. Kissinger, F. Fukuyama, S. Huntington, R. Pearl, etc.).

As for the modern development of the Russian geopolitical approach, it is certainly connected with the increase in research activities of several major competing geopolitical directions.

The most famous geopolitical school in modern Russia is the Neo-Eurasian one, the leader of which is the authoritative Russian thinker, author of a large number of monographs and textbooks on geopolitics A.G. Dugin, as well as his students, among whom are G.B. Gavrish¹, V.M. Korovin², L.S. Savin³, etc. From the point of view of Neo-Eurasians, Russia's special mission is to put together the Eurasian continental space. They see Russia as a “bridge of civilizations” designed to bring

together the countries of Europe and Asia. At the same time, according to E.G. Solovyov, "in contrast to classical Eurasianism, A. Dugin and his followers actively borrow certain elements of European continental projects, expanding the horizons of Eurasianism to the whole of Europe and even Eurasia. The thesis of the need to create a "national ideocracy of imperial continental scale" is the key in the Dugin version of neo-Eurasianism. Teleology and the universal significance of Russian history, Russia's special mission are categorically derived from its continental, "tellukratic" vocation"⁴.

Other Russian authors, including K.S. Gadzhiev, A.S. Panarin, K. Pleshakov, K.E. Sorokin, R.F. Turovsky, V. Tsymbursky, etc., have followed and are following the geopolitical problems. Nevertheless, in the modern Russian scientific environment, geopolitical research has not yet received an independent status. Some authors consider geopolitics as an offshoot of the history of international relations. Others consider it a field of political science or political geography. Finally, still others, as noted above, defend the problems of the fundamental dualism of political communities.

In modern conditions, however, in geopolitical studies the developments of the French school⁵ are most often used. The French school is distinguished by the rejection of the "objective law" dualism of land and sea, typical of the Anglo-Saxon and German traditions. Moreover, for French geopolitics, the idea of gradual convergence, interpenetration of land and sea – these opposing, from the point of view of H. Mackinder and other British, American and German authors, geopolitical forces – is of greater importance. The French school representatives deny the decisive influence of material, natural, and geographical factors on political processes. The French school is characterized not by geographical determinism, but by the primacy of human will and initiative. Thus, Paul Vidal de la Blache sharply criticized F. Ratzel, for his geographical determinism and put forward the principle of "possibilism", which is fundamentally important for

modern French geopolitics, according to which a particular space only provides the state with opportunities for its geopolitical configuration, but the realization of these opportunities depends on the will of people. A characteristic feature of French geopolitics is the emphasis not on the spatial and geographical dimensions of states and their natural borders, but on such more important factors, from the point of view of its representatives, as the organization of the territory, its attitude to communications.

It was the French school of geopolitics that was one of the first to pay attention to the issues of social geography, which contributed to the development of “internal geopolitics” – the study of political rivalry observed within one nation (for example, in the electoral sphere). According to French geopoliticians, spatial and geographical factors do not exhaust the variety of reasons that influence the political behavior of the state and which therefore should be supplemented by factors of time, duration, history.

Finally, another feature of the French school of geopolitics is the tendency of its representatives to consider geopolitics as a method of research. It is characterized by an emphasis on social “ideas” about space and taking into account the combination of spatial (local, national, regional, global, network) and temporal (short-term, long-term and perspective) characteristics of the object under study.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that the multidimensional structure of geopolitics in modern conditions is differentiated, including *global*, *regional* and *local*. Experts also distinguish between *external* and *internal* geopolitics.

In the context of globalization, the influence of geopolitical processes has increased not only at the macro-regional (interstate) level, but also in regional politics. Therefore, along with globalism, there is a formation of *regionalism* that takes into account the influence of not only internal but also external factors on regional development.

Thus, in recent decades, a shift in the emphasis of geopolitics has been increasingly recorded – from the global level to the regional one. The optimal unit of analysis is the geopolitical region as a kind of geopolitical, geo-economic and geocultural integrity, demonstrating a dynamic moment in geopolitical analysis (cross-border nature, variability of contours, change of dominant regional powers, cultural, ethnic and demographic transformations). From this point of view, attempts at regional geopolitical analysis of individual world regions or the post-Soviet space are not without some meaning.

In this regard, a clear line between foreign and domestic policy, between territorial levels of political governance is gradually being erased. There is a phenomenon of *glocalization* – direct mutual influences of global factors and subnational (regional and local) with the subordinate role of states. Under these conditions, a scientific term was needed that would synthesize the directions of analysis of the problem at the strategic and sub-state levels, as well as the participation of sub- and trans-state regions in politics. Such properties are possessed by the term “internal geopolitics” introduced into scientific circulation.

This concept, conceptualized in the French geopolitical school, the most reasoned analysis, apparently, found in a number of articles by M.V. Ilyin.⁶ The subject of the study of “internal geopolitics” is the internal structure of politics (“the configuration of the articulation of geographical possibilities and principles of political organization”), as well as the internal policy of states in the context of geographical parameters and their social systems. M.V. Ilyin identifies two types of geographical factors. The first of them is material (geomorphology, natural zones, areas and settlement networks, linguistic and ethnocultural areas, economic and transport infrastructure, communication and organizational interactions). The second type of factors can be called spiritual and mental, since M.V. Ilyin refers to it

geopolitical codes, images, identity, “memory” about the ways of applying geopolitical factors.

Thus, *internal geopolitics* is a field of scientific knowledge that explores models of the structure of the political space of countries, identifies factors of the geopolitical situation and development of regions, and also suggests measures to manage the territorial development of the state.

The geopolitical approach, which is of universal interest and of undoubted value for Russian political science as a whole, is especially indispensable for studying the situation in the South of Russia. Based on this methodology, it is possible not only to study multidimensional and multifactorial processes, but also to actively cope with serious challenges to national security and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation emanating from this region, which is an important practical side of the issue.

In this regard, the geopolitical theme, since the 1990s, occupies a significant place in the works of South Russian researchers. In the south of Russia in the post-Soviet period, many conferences, seminars, and round tables devoted to geopolitical issues were held. The year 1998 was particularly significant in the life of the region’s geopolitics. At the end of April, scientific readings “The Caucasus: Problems of geopolitics and national-state interests of Russia”⁷ were held, which contributed to the emergence of an informal community of geopolitics of the South Russian macro-region.

At the end of 1999, the Center for Regional Studies was established on the basis of Rostov State University (since 2006 – the Institute of Sociology and Regional Studies of the Southern Federal University), within which a large number of conferences, round tables, and other scientific events were held, and collections of scientific articles, monographs and educational materials began to be published under the heading “South Russian Review”. Over the years of publishing activity, the Center has published more than 100 collections of articles, about 15 of them on geopolitical issues⁸.

Questions of geopolitics began to worry not only venerable and novice scientists, but also students. The course "Geopolitics", originally for political science students, began to be taught in a number of higher educational institutions in the southern Russian region. Later, textbooks on this subject appeared, among which we note "Politicheskaya regionalistika (na materialakh Yuzhnogo federalnogo okruga)", prepared by a team of authors from the North Caucasus Academy of Public Administration headed by Professor Ignatov V.G.⁹, as well as a five-volume course of lectures "Political regionalism", proposed by Kuban scientists A.V. Baranov and A.A. Vartumyan¹⁰. In 2022, the Southern Federal University published a textbook on geopolitical processes in the Black Sea-Caspian region¹¹.

During the same period, the region's scientists begin to develop geopolitical studies of the subjects of the Near and Middle East, the Caucasian macroregion, and the south of Russia. Among them are Rostov residents A.G. Druzhinin, I.P. Dobaev, S.N. Epifantsev¹²; scientists from the Chechen State University V.H. Akaev and G.B. Vok¹³; researchers from Dagestan Z.S. Arukhov, E.M. Magaramov, Z.A. Makhulova, G.A. Murklinskaya¹⁴; author from the Karachayevo-Cherkessian Republic A.A. Ebzeev¹⁵ and others. Nevertheless, it is still premature to say that geopolitics as a science has taken place in the South of Russia.

In modern Russia, geopolitics is largely considered not as an independent science, but in line with the provisions of the French geopolitical school, as a kind of geopolitical methodology that proposes to reduce the most significant processes to a single geographical matrix and explore it in relation to external and global factors. The multifactorial nature of the geopolitical methodology is reflected in the definition of geopolitics presented in the popular encyclopedia "Geopolitics"¹⁶: *"Geopolitics is the theory and practice of modern international relations and prospects for their development, taking into account the large-scale systemic influence of geographical, political, economic, military, demographic, environmental, scientific, technical and other factors."* Approximately

the same opinion was held, for example, by the American classic of traditional and new geopolitics N. Spikeman, who considered geopolitics precisely as *an analytical method that allows to develop an effective international policy*.

Using a geopolitical approach, several dissertations for the degree of PhD(Politics) were prepared and defended in the South of Russia already at the beginning of the “zero”, among them we note the studies of Z.A. Makhulova¹⁷, E.M. Magaramov¹⁸, A.T. Abakarov¹⁹, M.V. Dzhevakov²⁰, etc.

So, geopolitics, as a method of multifactorial analysis in relation to a particular geographical matrix of different scales (planet, international region, state, intra-state region), is taking an increasingly serious position in the study of ongoing political processes. Especially its importance in our country increased after the end of the cold war and the ideological confrontation, when there was a conceptual vacuum in the analysis of the ongoing processes. Under the current conditions, the importance and effectiveness of the geopolitical method for analyzing the processes taking place in one or another part of the world has increased. At the same time, geopolitics, as a qualitatively new public knowledge, experienced its new rise in the 1990s, as it turned out that only it is able to fully meet new requirements, revealing the ambiguity of geopolitical processes, their characteristic paradoxes and contradictions.

Geopolitics is a rather complex, multidimensional and dynamically developing phenomenon, and it is increasingly penetrating the domestic (regional) level, contributing to a comprehensive understanding and analysis of ongoing processes.

In such circumstances, it is not so important, as A.G. Dugin emphasized in conversations with the author of this article, whether geopolitics is a full-fledged scientific discipline or not, it is indisputable that the geopolitical method is effective, productive and is an excellent help in the political, sociological and strategic analysis of most acute problems of our time. In this regard, according to A.G. Dugin, it is necessary to give academic

and scientific-practical character to geopolitical research with appropriate institutionalization of geopolitics as an independent field of political research²¹.

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